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Conference Abstract

"Critter of the Week": Wikipedia as a Museum Outreach Tool

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Abstract

Many museums spend time and money fruitlessly competing with Wikipedia, creating online information resources and image galleries that will be mostly ignored, as Wikipedia is usually the highest ranked search result for any query. Wikimedia Commons can host searchable, downloadable images and Wikipedia can be easily edited by volunteers and specialists; both cost nothing to use and have a global audience. Yet most museums have no Wikipedia strategy, and often their institutional copyright policies – needlessly, for most natural history collections – prevent them from engaging and openly sharing collection information. I'll illustrate this with the case study of the *Critter of the Week* project, a collaboration between Radio NZ and the Department of Conservation that relies on the open image libraries of Auckland Museum and Landcare Research.

There are simple institutional policies and procedures any museum can take that will support the work of the 70,000 volunteer Wikipedia editors. An institution can also directly host edit-a-thons and Wikipedia events, organise backstage tours for local Wikipedians, and host a Wikipedian in Residence. Subject specialists in a museum can even edit and update Wikipedia themselves, reaching a larger audience than almost any other science communication medium. In some ways, this is the opposite of how GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) institutions are used to working: collaborating with non-experts, releasing imperfect and unfinished content, abandoning branding opportunities, and no longer being the single voice of authority. But if we're serious about being relevant to our public, we need to meet them where they are – which is on Wikipedia.

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